"Doc" McNeal Finishing Strong

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Many ADVS alumni and students alike will recall fond memories of Dr. Lyle McNeal, who will be retiring with the completion of spring semester after 40 years of teaching at Utah State University. McNeal is an Aggie through and through. He received his PhD in animal science reproductive physiology with a range science minor from Utah State University in 1978, and began teaching here in 1979.

Throughout his life, McNeal has worked to promote agriculture in many different ways. He served as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Justice, advocating for farmers and ranchers; helped to rescue and care for animals trapped by the flood resulting from the break of Idaho's Teton Dam; worked as an Extension Specialist for sheep and horses in the state of Nevada; and spent 10 years teaching at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo before coming to Utah State.

Among McNeal's many endeavors is The Navajo Sheep project, established in 1977. This non-profit organization focused on saving the Navajo-Churro sheep has gained national attention through the years. The Churro, a unique breed of sheep having four horns and long fleece, plays a significant role in Navajo culture. Their wool is used for weaving and the sheep themselves are considered sacred to the people. Through McNeal's efforts, the project has been able to reintroduce thousands of sheep to the Navajo people.

McNeal never intended to become a professor, but planned to return home to manage the family ranch. When given the opportunity to teach, he recognized the potential to encourage and influence students who could make a positive impact in the field of agriculture. With his strong belief in the importance of agriculture and desire to buoy up future agriculturists, McNeal decided to take the opportunity. “I feel that teaching was really a calling,” McNeal said.

McNeal encourages all to pursue education. He understands personally the sacrifices that this may require, but believes firmly that it’s worth it. As a student-focused professor, among McNeal’s most rewarding experiences have been getting to know students in his classes when they begin their education and again when they are nearing graduation. He explained that it’s wonderful to see how his students have worked hard and persevered. "It's like harvesting a crop after four years of growth," he said. "I'm gonna miss these kids... but I'll be around."

It's easy to see the type of professor and individual "Doc" is in the way he dedicates himself. Although we will miss having him here with us on campus, his impact and legacy will continue to live on. We express gratitude for his many contributions to the ADVS Department throughout the years and wish him a happy retirement.

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